

****Recommendations and participants included****

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SENATOR KENNEDY JOINS FORCES WITH RELIEF ORGANIZATIONS FOR HURRICANE KATRINA VICTIMS

Washington, D.C.—Today, Senator Edward M. Kennedy met with relief organizations working to provide support to Hurricane Katrina victims. The participants, among whom Michael Casserly, Executive Director, Council of Great City Schools, Leslie Baskerville, Executive Director of the National Association of Equal Opportunity in higher Education (NAFEO) and Dr. Georges Benjamin, Executive Director of the American Public Health Association met with the legislators today to discuss the situation in the gulf coast and the best ways to implement relief and support services for those affected.

Dozens of representatives from nationwide relief organizations met with Kennedy this morning and relayed their experiences and recommendations for meeting the challenge of providing support services to a region severely hit with health care, education, economic and structural devastation. These recommendations, along with initial proposals put forth by Kennedy and Chairman Mike Enzi, will result in legislation to assist Hurricane Katrina victims.

Senator Kennedy, ranking member of the United State Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, will propose legislative remedies to ensure that hurricane victims will receive critical support in the days and months ahead.

Among the proposals offered are initiatives in health care, education and economic relief. Addressing the health care challenges is a top priority as curbing infectious disease in the region and providing mental health outreach and support are immediate concerns that have the ability to affect long-term relief efforts. Senator Kennedy believes that persons affected by the hurricane should be eligible for Medicaid with full Federal reimbursement and waived co-payments, in addition to HHS waiving the income and residency requirements for Medicaid. Kennedy is also working with the mental health community to ensure that evacuees have the resources they need to cope with this disaster.

Many of those affected by the hurricane are children and students pursuing higher education. Kennedy will seek \$2,500 per child to school districts who receive displaced children, as well as freezing student debt repayment for six months. Displaced students receiving student aid should continue and matching for campus-based aid programs should be waived for those universities accepting displaced students.

Economists predict that up to one million people will be left jobless as a result of the hurricane. Proposals to provide economic aid to evacuees include providing disaster unemployment assistance for unemployed workers, allowing people to withdraw funds from 401 (k)s and IRA's

penalty-free and allowing the postponement and payment deadlines for pension plans.

Kennedy said, “Hurricane Katrina and the destruction it caused in multiple southern states is a national tragedy, and the national government needs to lead in the months and years ahead. We can’t rest until we’ve rebuilt these communities and until we’ve restored hope in the hundreds of thousands of American citizens who find themselves homeless, jobless, and without any idea of what the future holds for them.”

The Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee will convene on Thursday to discuss and put into motion the proposals outlined today.

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Labor & Pensions

- **Disaster Unemployment Assistance.** Legislation is needed to correct flaws in the DUA program that keep it from helping as many disaster victims as it should. In addition, the Department of Labor should suspend regulations that impose barriers to people receiving DUA.
- **Pensions and IRAs.** There is a provision in the Enzi/Kennedy pension reform bill that gives the Secretaries of Labor and Treasury and the PBGC authority to postpone filing and payment deadlines for pension plans affected by Katrina. The rules for 401(k) plans should be relaxed for Katrina victims to allow them to withdraw money, and allow loans from IRAs for living expenses and home rebuilding.

Education

- **Funding for school districts near the disaster zone.** Grants should be provided to communities that have accepted refugees to help them cope with an upsurge in new students.
- **Assistance to students.** Students from the areas affected by Katrina should receive deferments on their need to repay student loans and/or financial assistance in transferring to another institute of higher education if needed.
- **Flexibility in administering programs.** Income requirements should be waived for access to Head Start in the affected areas. HHS should grant flexibility under CCDBG on child care subsidy payments. NCLB requirements should similarly be applied flexibly in affected areas.
- **Funds for rebuilding.** Communities affected by Katrina should receive funding for rebuilding their education and healthcare infrastructure.

Health

- **Disease surveillance and control.** Funding should be provided for measures to control

epidemics in the affected areas. In the long term, the health of refugees should be studied and care should be provided if exposure to toxic chemicals from flood water increases refugees' risk of chronic illnesses. Diseases will spread quickly in cramped refugee camps. Temporary housing needs to be built immediately not only to prevent infectious diseases but to restore hope.

- **Mental health.** Funding is needed to deal with the mental health consequences of the disaster. Legislation to support children's mental health should be strengthened and reauthorized and the overall provision of mental health services to victims of the storm should be federally facilitated.
- **Disabilities.** Allow flexible use of funds under the Developmental Disabilities Act to help support people with disabilities and their families at the local level who are victims of the storm.
- **Eligibility for care.** Refugees should receive 100% Medicaid reimbursement.
- **De-politicizing decision-making.** CDC and FEMA should be able to directly request support and funding without having to clear decisions through the political bureaucracies at HHS and DHS, respectively.

RELIEF ORGANIZATION PARTICIPANTS

Leslie Baskerville, Executive Director of NAFEO (Historically Black Colleges and Universities)

Warlene Garry, Executive Director of National PTA (not confirmed).

Linda Smith, Executive Director of National Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies

Reg Weaver, President of NEA

Michael Casserly, Executive Director, Council of Great City Schools.

Ed McElroy, President, AFT (not confirmed).

Mark Ginsberg, Executive Director of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Dino Curris, President AASCU

David Warren, President NAICU

Father Charles Currie, Jesuit Colleges

David Baime, American Association of Community Colleges

Nils Hasselmo, the President of AAU

David Ward, the President of ACE

Representative from AFL-CIO.

Representative from ACORN.

Representative from American Hospital Association

Bill Harris (Kids Pact) and Ellen Gerrity from Children's Mental Health Trauma Network

Chris Koranagi from the Bazelon Center for Mental Health

Ralph Ipson and Julio Abreu from NMHA

Julia Ciorletti, Julia Jiuliushobson and T.C. Roberge from AMA

Dr. George Hardy, executive director of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (not confirmed).

Dan Hawkins, Vice President of the National Association of Community Health Centers, which serve many of the impoverished population forced to flee after Katrina.

Dr. Georges Benjamin, Executive Director of the American Association for Public Health and a former state health commissioner.

Mildred Brown, head of the Washington office of ACORN